

Section D

Section D. Claims for Service Connection for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**Overview**

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD

Introduction

This topic contains general information on developing claims for service connection for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including

- the requirements for establishing service connection for PTSD
 - the significance of prisoner-of-war (POW) and combat service
 - the definition of ***engaging in combat***
 - decorations as evidence of combat
 - action to take if a Veteran received a combat decoration but does not expressly state the nature of the stressor
 - what constitutes credible supporting evidence
 - the degree of stressor corroboration required
 - considering non-combat-related stressors
 - primary sources of evidence used to corroborate a claimed in-service stressor
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 - secondary sources of evidence that may corroborate a claimed in-service stressor, and
 - considering buddy statements.
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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

**a.
Requirements for
Establishing Service
Connection
for PTSD**

Service connection for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) requires

- credible evidence that the claimed in-service stressor occurred
- medical evidence diagnosing the condition in accordance with [38 CFR 4.125](#), and
- a link, established by medical evidence, between current symptoms and an in-service stressor.

Exception: When PTSD is properly diagnosed in service, it is not necessary to verify the stressor in order to establish service connection under [38 CFR 3.304\(f\)](#) as long as the claimed stressor is

- related to the Veteran's service, and
- consistent with the circumstances, conditions, or hardships of that service.

Important: The lay testimony of a combat Veteran alone may establish an in-service stressor for the purposes of establishing service connection for PTSD.

Reference: For more information on establishing service connection for PTSD, see

- [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart iv, 4.H](#)
- [38 CFR 3.304\(f\)](#), and
- [38 U.S.C. 1154\(b\)](#).

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

b. Significance of POW and Combat Service

The Veteran's testimony alone establishes the occurrence of the claimed in-service stressor if

- the evidence of record confirms the Veteran
 - engaged in combat, or
 - was a prisoner-of-war (POW) as defined by [38 CFR 3.1\(y\)](#)
- the claimed stressor is related to that episode of combat or POW experience,
- there is no clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, and
- the claimed stressor is consistent with the circumstances, conditions, or hardships of the Veteran's service.

Note: There are no limitations as to the type of evidence that may be accepted to confirm engagement in combat. Any evidence that is probative of (serves to establish the fact at issue) combat participation may be used to support a determination that a Veteran engaged in combat.

References: For more information on

- claims for service connection for PTSD, see
 - [38 CFR 3.304\(f\)](#), and
 - [38 U.S.C. 1154\(b\)](#), and
- evidence that may be used to support a determination that a Veteran engaged in combat with the enemy, see [VAOPGCPREC Opinion 12-99](#).

c. Definition: Engaging in Combat

Engaging in combat with the enemy means personal participation in events constituting an actual fight or encounter with a military foe or hostile unit or instrumentality. It includes presence during such events either as a

- combatant, or
- service member performing duty in support of combatants, such as providing medical care to the wounded.

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

d. Decorations as Evidence of Combat

When a Veteran has received any of the combat decorations listed below, VA will presume that the Veteran engaged in combat with the enemy, unless there is clear and convincing evidence to the contrary:

- Air Force Achievement Medal with “V” Device
- Air Force Combat Action Medal
- Air Force Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Air Force Cross
- Air Medal with “V” Device
- Army Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Bronze Star Medal with “V” Device
- Combat Action Badge
- Combat Action Ribbon (**Note:** Prior to February 1969, the Navy Achievement Medal with “V” Device was awarded.)
- Combat Aircrew Insignia
- Combat Infantry/Infantryman Badge
- Combat Medical Badge
- Distinguished Flying Cross
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Joint Service Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Medal of Honor
- Navy Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Navy Cross
- Purple Heart, and/or
- Silver Star.

Important:

- Receipt of one of the decorations cited above is not the only acceptable evidence of engagement in combat.
- If a Veteran received a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, or Iraq Campaign Medal, but not one of the combat decorations cited above, develop for the claimed stressor as shown in [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.14](#). Receipt of these campaign medals alone does not generally indicate engagement in combat.

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

e. Action to Take if Veteran Received Combat Decoration but Does Not State Nature of Stressor

If a Veteran received one of the combat decorations cited in [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.13.d](#) but does not expressly state the nature of the stressor

- assume the stressor is combat-related
- order an examination, if necessary to decide the claim, and
- in the examination request
 - state that VA has verified the Veteran's combat service, and
 - specify any details regarding the combat stressor contained in the record.

f. What Constitutes Credible Supporting Evidence

Credible supporting evidence that an in-service stressor actually occurred includes not only evidence that specifically documents the Veteran's personal participation in the event, but evidence that

- indicates the Veteran served in the immediate area and at the particular time in which the stressful event is alleged to have occurred, and
- supports the description of the event.

Notes:

- Evaluate the evidence as a whole to determine whether a stressor is sufficiently corroborated. (See [Moran v. Principi](#), 17 Vet.App. 149 (2003).)
- Corroborating evidence of a stressor is *not* restricted to service records, but may be obtained from other sources. (See [Doran v. Brown](#), 6 Vet.App. 283 (1994).)
- The credible supporting evidence requirement does not necessarily demand the submission of official documentary evidence.

g. The Degree of Stressor Corroboration Required

Corroboration of every detail, including the claimant's personal participation in the claimed stressful event, is not required. The evidence may be sufficient if it implies a Veteran's personal exposure to the event.

Examples:

- When considered as a whole, evidence consisting of a morning report, radio log, and nomination for a Bronze Star with "V" device may be sufficient to corroborate a

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Veteran's account of an event, even if it does not specifically include mention of the Veteran's name. (See [*Suozzi v. Brown*](#), 10 Vet.App. 307 (1997).)

- Unit records documenting the Veteran's presence with a specific unit at the time mortar attacks occurred may be sufficient to corroborate a Veteran's statement that she/he experienced such attacks personally. (See [*Pentecost v. Principi*](#), 16 Vet.App. 124 (2002).)

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

h. Considering Non-Combat-Related Stressors

PTSD may result from a non-combat stressor, such as

- a plane crash
- a ship sinking
- an explosion
- a rape or assault
- duty in a burn ward or graves registration unit
- witnessing the death, injury, or threat to the physical being of another person not caused by the enemy, and
- actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's own physical being not caused by the enemy.

i. Primary Sources of Evidence Used to Corroborate a Claimed In-Service Stressor

Primary evidence, generally considered the most reliable source for verifying in-service stressors, is typically obtained from the

- U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) (formerly the U.S. Armed Services Center for Unit Records Research (CURR))
- National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)
- Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections (MCASC), or
- Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service website links.

Note: Carefully review primary evidence for information corroborating participation in combat or to otherwise corroborate a claimed in-service stressor.

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

j. Examples of Primary Evidence

Primary evidence may include

- unit and organizational histories
- daily staff journals
- operational reports-lessons learned
- after-action reports
- radio logs, deck logs, and ship histories
- muster rolls
- command chronology and war diaries
- monthly summary and reports
- information from VBA-sanctioned websites located on the [PTSD Rating Job Aid website](#).

Note: Generally, documents written or recorded by the lowest possible unit in the chain of the command are the most probative source of information to verify a claimed stressor, because, by nature, they tend to include details of events with greater precision. **Examples:**

- A company commander's narrative is likely of greater relevance and specificity than a battalion commander's.
- A Navy ship's deck log would likely yield more probative information than a fleet log.

Reference: For information on where to send requests for Navy deck logs, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.14.g](#).

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

k. Secondary Sources of Evidence That May Corroborate a Claimed In-Service Stressor

Carefully review the following secondary sources of evidence for information confirming participation in combat or to otherwise corroborate a claimed in-service stressor:

- military occupational specialty (MOS) evidence (**Note:** A Veteran's MOS may be specified on his/her *DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*, or in the personnel folder.)
- hazard pay records (**Note:** This information may be requested from the Department of Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS).)
- personnel folder (**Note:** This information may be requested via PIES.)
- service treatment records (STRs)
- performance reports (**Note:** This information may be requested via PIES.)
- verification that the Veteran received Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay (**Note:** This information may be requested through the Veterans Information Solution (VIS).)
- buddy statements
- contemporaneous letters and diaries
- newspaper archives, and
- information from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)-sanctioned websites, which may be accessed through the [PTSD Rating Job Aid web site](#).

Important:

- All sources of evidence obtained for purposes of stressor corroboration must be fully documented in the file.
Example: Print and file pages from a sanctioned website used in the determination of combat participation.
- While confirmation of receipt of Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay through the VIS alone does not constitute verification of a combat-related stressor, it may, in combination with other evidence, "tip the scales" in favor of the Veteran's assertion of his/her involvement in combat.

Reference: For more information on considering buddy statements, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.13.1](#).

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13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

**I.
Considering
Buddy
Statements**

Accept a buddy statement as corroboration of a claimed in-service stressor, so long as the statement is consistent with the time, place, and circumstances of the service of both the Veteran and the buddy.

If the evidence available calls into question the qualifications of the buddy to make the statement, ask the person to submit his/her *DD Form 214* or other evidence of service with the claimant.

Note: Upon receipt of a *DD Form 214* (or other document containing personally identifiable information) from a fellow Veteran

- place the document in a separate envelope in the claims folder, and
 - annotate on the envelope that the contents must not be
 - reproduced, or
 - reviewed by the Veteran to whom the claims folder pertains or his/her representative.
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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred

Introduction This topic contains information on requesting evidence that a stressor occurred, including

- the location of in-service mental health treatment records
- developing for in-service mental health treatment records
- when to request hospital reports and clinical records
- when to request evidence from the Veteran to establish a stressor
- the information to request from the Veteran to support a stressor
- the minimum information required from the Veteran
- the PIES codes to use when submitting a records request
- relevant personnel records in PTSD cases, and
- where to send requests for Navy deck logs.

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a. Location of In-Service Mental Health Treatment Records The military or civilian treating facility maintains in-service mental health records. They are not stored by the Department of Defense with the traditional STRs.

Notes:

- The records are typically destroyed five years after the end of the year in which the case is closed.
- Civilian facility records cannot be obtained from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) through PIES.

b. Developing for In-Service Mental Health Treatment Records The table below shows the steps to follow when developing for in-service mental health treatment records from a civilian mental health facility.

Step	Action
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the Veteran to complete a <i>VA Form 21-4142, Authorization and Consent to Release Information</i>, and • allow 30 days for response.

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

Continued

b. Developing for In-Service Mental Health Treatment Records (continued)

Step	Action						
2	<p>Did the Veteran return the <i>VA Form 21-4142</i> within 30 days?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, go to Step 4. • If no, no further development is needed. 						
3	<p>Continue developing for the mental health treatment records until receiving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the records, or • a negative reply. 						
4	<table> <tr> <th>If the facility indicates that ...</th><th>Then ...</th></tr> <tr> <td>the records were transferred to another location</td><td>develop for the records from the location identified until receiving the records or a negative reply.</td></tr> <tr> <td>the records have been destroyed or are otherwise unavailable.</td><td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cease developing, and • prepare a formal finding of record unavailability per M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.59. </td></tr> </table>	If the facility indicates that ...	Then ...	the records were transferred to another location	develop for the records from the location identified until receiving the records or a negative reply.	the records have been destroyed or are otherwise unavailable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cease developing, and • prepare a formal finding of record unavailability per M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.59.
If the facility indicates that ...	Then ...						
the records were transferred to another location	develop for the records from the location identified until receiving the records or a negative reply.						
the records have been destroyed or are otherwise unavailable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cease developing, and • prepare a formal finding of record unavailability per M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.59. 						

c. When to Request Hospital Reports and Clinical Records

Request hospital reports and clinical records if the Veteran indicates pertinent treatment in a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility, Vet Center, or elsewhere.

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

Continued

d. When to Request Evidence From the Veteran to Establish a Stressor

Request the Veteran to provide credible supporting evidence to establish that a stressor occurred if the evidence of record

- shows that the Veteran was engaged in combat, but the claimed stressor is not related to that combat, or
- does *not* show that the Veteran was engaged in combat.

e. Information to Request From the Veteran to Support a Stressor

Use the PTSD development letter in the Modern Awards Processing-Development (MAP-D) application to request information from the Veteran.

Enclose *VA Form 21-0781, Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*, to solicit specific details of each of the in-service stressful incidents, such as the

- date of the incident
- place of the incident
- unit of assignment at the time of the incident
- detailed description of the event
- medals or citations received as a result of the incident, and
- name and other identifying information concerning any other individuals involved in the event, if appropriate.

Important: Do not ask the Veteran for specific details in any case in which there is credible supporting evidence that the claimed in-service stressor occurred, such as evidence of internment as a POW or receipt of one of the decorations listed in [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.13.d](#).

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

Continued

**f.
Minimum
Information
Required
From the
Veteran**

At a minimum, the Veteran *must* provide the following:

- a stressor that can be documented
- the location where the incident took place
- the approximate date (within a two-month period) of the incident, and
- the unit of assignment at the time the stressful event occurred.

Inform the Veteran that

- the information is necessary to obtain supportive evidence of each of the stressful events, and
- failure to respond or an incomplete response may result in denial of the claim.

Notes:

- Specific details of claimed stressful events may also be gathered from such sources as VA or private medical treatment reports and examination reports.
- Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) may obtain the date and location of well-documented events, such as the Tet Offensive, from VBA-sanctioned web sites (available through the [PTSD Rating Job Aid website](#)) and supply this information on the Veteran's behalf.

Reference: For information on the types of stressors that may be impossible to corroborate, see the [JSRRC Stressor Verification Guide, Section V](#).

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

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**g. PIES
Codes to
Use When
Submitting
a Records
Request**

Use the following PIES request codes to request records required to process a claim for service connection for PTSD:

- Use PIES request code O18 if
 - the stressor is associated with an episode of personal trauma, such as rape, assault, and so forth, or
 - the Veteran is claiming service connection for PTSD as a result of both personal trauma and other types of stressors.
- Use PIES request code O19 for verification of all other types of stressors.

Notes:

- Only select documents from the Veteran's personnel folder, including those listed under [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.14.h](#), are provided in response to submission of a PIES request under request code O19.
- A copy of *all* documents within the personnel folder are provided in response to a PIES request submitted under request code O18.
- Because of the time and cost involved in photocopying all documents within a personnel folder, do not submit a request to NPRC (address code 13) under request code O18 unless the claim involves personal trauma.
- If documents not routinely provided by NPRC in response to a request submitted under request code O19 are needed, identify the documents in a customized request, using request code O99.
- Records related to in-service mental health treatment cannot be requested through PIES because they are
 - maintained by the military or civilian treating facility, and
 - not stored by the Department of Defense with the traditional STRs.

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

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h. Relevant Personnel Records in PTSD Cases

The table below identifies the forms that contain information about the Veteran's unit(s) of assignment, military occupation, and service locations.

Note: These forms are among the documents that will be provided in response to PIES requests submitted under request code O19.

Branch of Service	Name(s) of Forms
Army	<p><i>DA Form 2-1, Personnel Qualification Record.</i></p> <p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>DA Form 2-1</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is used for both officers and enlisted personnel, and - first came into use in January 1973. • Prior to January 1973, <i>DA Form 20, Enlisted Qualification Record</i> and <i>DA Form 66, Officer Qualification Record</i> were used.
Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlisted record of <i>Transfer and Receipts</i>, pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 12 - 32, and - 33 • enlisted record <i>Administrative Remarks</i>, pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 through 9 - 13, and - 34, and • officer record, <i>NAVPERS 1301/51, Officer Data Card</i>, page 35. <p>Note: <i>DD Form 214</i> and enlistment contracts are usually included.</p>
Air Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlisted record, <i>AF Form 7, Airman Military Record</i>, pages 36 through 39 • officer record, <i>AF Form 11, Officer Military Record</i>, pages 39 and 40, and • performance reports for both enlisted personnel and officers.

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

Continued

h. Relevant Personnel Records in PTSD Cases (continued)

Branch of Service	Name(s) of Forms
Marine Corps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlistment contracts • discharge papers • <i>MABMC-11 (discharge order)</i>, and • service records, pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 - 5 through 6 - 8 through 9 - 12 through 13, and - 17.
Coast Guard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlisted record • <i>Endorsement on Order Sheet, (DoT Form CG 3312B)</i> • officer record • <i>Service Records Card</i> • <i>DoT Form CG CG 3301</i> • <i>DoT Form CG CG 3303</i> • <i>DoT Form CG CG 3305</i>, pages 3, 5, 6-7 • <i>DD Form 214</i>, and • the enlistment contract.

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14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred,

Continued

**i. Where to
Send
Requests
for Navy
Deck Logs**

Use the table below to determine the address to use when requesting Navy deck logs.

If the Navy deck logs ...	Then send the request to ...
are dated 1940 or earlier	Old Military and Civil Records National Archives and Records Administration 700 Pennsylvania Ave., NW Washington, DC 20408
are dated between 1941 and 30 years prior to the current date	Modern Military Branch National Archives 8601 Adelphi Rd. College Park, MD 20740
are less than 30 years old	Department of the Navy Naval Historical Center 805 Kidder Breese, SE Washington Navy Yard Washington, DC 20374-5060

Reference: For more information on Navy deck logs and how to obtain them, see

<http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/org15-1.htm>.

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor

Introduction

This topic contains information on requesting verification of an in-service stressor, including

- when to request corroboration of an in-service stressor
 - where to send a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor
 - the information to include in requests to the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) (formerly the U.S. Armed Services Center for Unit Records Research (CURR))
 - sending requests for research of Marine Corps unit records to NARA
 - accessing Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era unit records through Virtual VA
 - requesting stressor corroboration from Marine Corps records dated after the Vietnam Era
 - the responsibilities of the Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections (MCASC)
 - information to include in requests to MCASC
 - sample letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor
 - the duties of the JSRRC coordinator
 - invalid or incomplete requests
 - denying service connection because of an unconfirmed stressor
 - handling requests for more information, and
 - the failure of a Veteran to provide sufficient information.
-

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

a. When to Request Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor

Submit a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor if

- the evidence does not corroborate the Veteran's claim that he/she engaged in combat or experienced other in-service stressor(s)
- the in-service stressor claimed is capable of being documented
- the Veteran's records contain
 - evidence of a diagnosis of PTSD, such as outpatient treatment records showing treatment for PTSD, *or*
 - competent lay evidence of persistent or recurrent symptoms of PTSD, such as the Veteran's description of symptoms indicative of PTSD, and
- development is complete in every respect except for
 - corroboration of the in-service stressor, and
 - a confirmed diagnosis of PTSD.

Important:

- Do *not* schedule a VA examination before receiving corroboration of the claimed in-service stressor. A diagnosis of PTSD is not a prerequisite for initiating the stressor verification process.
- Some stressors are clearly impossible to document and should not be referred to the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) (formerly the U.S. Armed Services Center for Unit Records Research (CURR)), NARA, or the Marine Corps. If, after requesting/obtaining pertinent facts from the Veteran, it is obvious that corroboration simply is not feasible, the claim should be decided based on the evidence of record.

References: For information on

- where to send a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.b](#), and
- the types of stressors that may be impossible to corroborate, see the [JSRRC Stressor Verification Guide, Section V](#).

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

b. Where to Send a Request for Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor

Use the table below to determine where to send a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor, including requests for deck logs.

If the stressor occurred during service in the ...	Send the request to ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army • Navy • Air Force, or • Coast Guard 	<p>JSRRC (address code 55) via the PIES/ Defense Personnel Records Imaging System (DPRIS) interface under request code</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O40 - first (or only) stressor • O41 - second stressor (if more than one is claimed), or • O42 - third stressor (if more than two are claimed).
Marine Corps, during the Vietnam Era or earlier	<p>Address: National Archives and Records Administration Attention: Modern Military Records 8601 Adelphi Road College Park, MD 20740-6001</p> <p>Exceptions: Do <i>not</i> submit a request for stressor corroboration to this address if the claimed stressor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be corroborated through review of Marine Corps unit records in Virtual VA • occurred during assignment aboard a Navy ship, or • occurred after Vietnam Era service. <p>Note: Most unit records covering the Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era are available in Virtual VA.</p>

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

b. Where to Send a Request for Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor (continued)

If the stressor occurred during service in the ...	Send the request to ...
Marine Corps, after the Vietnam Era	<p>Address: Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections Alfred M. Gray Research Center 2040 Broadway Street, MCCDC Quantico, VA 22134-5107</p> <p>Telephone number: (703) 784-4685 (Martha Robertson)</p> <p>Fax number: (703) 784-4665.</p> <p>Exceptions: Do <i>not</i> submit a request for stressor corroboration to this address or fax number if the claimed stressor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be corroborated through review of Marine Corps unit records in Virtual VA • occurred during assignment aboard a Navy ship, or • occurred during Vietnam Era service or earlier.
Marine Corps, during assignment aboard a Navy ship	<p>Address: U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center 7701 Telegraph Road Kingman Building, Room 2C08 Alexandria, VA 22315-3852</p> <p>Important: Do <i>not</i> submit these requests for stressor verification to JSRRC via the PIES/DPRIS interface.</p>

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

c. Information to Include in Requests to JSRRC

The following information must be included when submitting a request for stressor corroboration to JSRRC's mailing address or through the PIES/Defense Personnel Records Imaging System (DPRIS) interface:

- adequate identifying information, to include the claimant's full name and Social Security number (SSN)
- a description of the claimed stressor(s)
- month and year during which the stressful event occurred (JSRRC will research records dated 30 days before the date provided and 30 days after)
- the Veteran's unit of assignment at the time of the stressful event, and
- the geographic location where the stressful event took place.

Note: The telephone number for VA's liaison officer at JSRRC is (703) 428-6915.

Reference: For a listing of the personnel documents containing information about the Veteran's unit(s) of assignment and service locations, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.14.f.](#)

Additional information identified by JSRRC as helpful in conducting research includes

- the medals or citations received by the Veteran, and
 - the names of other soldiers or sailors involved in the stressful incident.
-

d. Sending Requests for Research of Marine Corps Unit Records to NARA

Send a request for research of Marine Corps unit records to NARA when

- corroboration of a stressor is required, and
- the unit records cover the Vietnam Era or earlier.

Exception: Unit records covering the Korean Conflict or the Vietnam Era may be accessed through Virtual VA. For more information, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.e](#)

Use to table below to request stressor corroboration from NARA.

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Step	Action
1	Access the inquiry form at NARA's website address .
2	Select "Records created by the United States military" from the drop-down list of question topics.

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

d. Sending Requests for Research of Marine Corps Unit Records to NARA (continued)

Step	Action
3	<p>In the box provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify yourself as a VBA employee, and • indicate the specific information you are seeking, as well as the Veteran's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - name - rank - unit of assignment at the time of the stressful event, and - inclusive dates of service.
4	Furnish your contact information in the spaces provided.

e. Accessing Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era Unit Records Through Virtual VA

Marine Corps unit records covering the Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era are available to VA personnel through Virtual VA.

Perform a thorough search of Virtual VA to obtain information needed to corroborate the claimed stressor(s) of a Korean Conflict or Vietnam Era Veteran.

Note: NARA maintains custodianship of the records in Virtual VA and is the ultimate authority on their content and organization.

f. Requesting Stressor Corroboration From Marine Corps Records Dated After the Vietnam Era

Send requests for stressor corroboration from Marine Corps unit records dated after the Vietnam Era directly to MCASC.

References: For information on

- MCASC's mailing address and fax number, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.b](#)
- what to include in the request to MCASC, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.h](#), and
- a sample of a letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.i](#).

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

g. Responsibilities of MCASC

When a regional office (RO) cannot document the claimed stressor of a Marine Corps Korean Conflict or Vietnam Era Veteran following a thorough search of the records in Virtual VA, or the claim requires research of unit records dated after the Vietnam Era, staff at MCASC is responsible for

- identifying the record(s) required to document the stressors, or
- providing confirmation that the claimed stressor(s) cannot be corroborated using records in its custody.

Important: An RO cannot deny a claim for PTSD based solely on the absence of a verified stressor until MCASC or NARA has confirmed the RO's negative findings.

h. Information to Include in Record Requests to MCASC

The following information must be included in each request to MCASC for records needed to document a claimed stressor:

- the Veteran's name and VA file number
- the name of the Veteran's squadron/battalion (or higher echelon)
- the date (month and year) the stressful event occurred (not to exceed a 60-day period)
- a concise description of the stressful event
- identification of the unit records reviewed through Virtual VA
- the mailing address of the requesting RO, and
- a point of contact at the RO.

Notes:

- The request may be faxed or mailed to MCASC, but it must be on VA letterhead and no more than one page in length.
- Do *not* attach to the request any medical information or statement(s) from the Veteran.
- Submit a request to MCASC *only* after exhausting all efforts to document the claimed stressor(s) through other means, including Virtual VA and/or *official* military web sites.

References: For

- MCASC's mailing address and fax number, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.b](#), and
- sample of a letter to MCASC for a determination as to the

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M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, Chapter 1,

availability of records required to corroborate a stressor,
see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.i.](#)

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

- i. Sample Letter to MCASC** A sample letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor is below.

Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections
 Alfred M. Gray Research Center
 2040 Broadway Street, MCCDC
 Quantico, VA 2213-5107

00/21
 C 123 45 6789
 JONES, John A.

Dear Sir/Madam:

This is a request for research of records in your possession for the purpose of verifying an in-service stressor claimed by a Veteran seeking service connection for posttraumatic stress disorder. This alleged stress occurred in **[name of country]**. I have already reviewed the following unit records that MCASC provided to VA on compact disc. **[List the unit records reviewed through Virtual VA, if applicable.]**

The following information is provided to assist your research:

Name of Claimant

John A. Jones

VA File Number

123 45 6789

Mailing Address

[Mailing address of regional office]

Name of Unit

[Name of unit in which the Veteran was serving when the stressful incident occurred]

Description of Stressful Event

The Veteran alleges that he witnessed the collision of two helicopters that killed 25-30 people at Camp Ratcliff between January and March 1969. All the bodies were reportedly charred and fused together.

Point of Contact

If additional information is required, please contact **[regional office employee's name]** at **[employee's telephone number]**.

Your assistance in this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

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Veterans Service Center Manager

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

j. Duties of the JSRRC Coordinator

The JSRRC coordinator is the primary point of contact for all JSRRC-related related issues within each regional office and

- determines whether or not submission of a request for stressor verification is appropriate
 - serves as the MCASC and NARA point of contact for issues related to records requests
 - personally submits all of the RO's requests for stressor corroboration
 - notifies JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA when further action on a pending research request is no longer necessary, (i.e., evidence is received that verifies the claimed stressor or the claim is withdrawn altogether)
 - determines the status of research requests pending at JSRRC by checking the [stressor corroboration database](#), and
 - forwards inquiries from the regional office regarding JSRRC-related issues to the VACO JSRRC e-mailbox at VAVBAWAS/CO/CURR.
-

k. Invalid or Incomplete Requests

JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA will return to the appropriate regional office any research request identified as invalid or incomplete, with an explanation of the deficiency(ies) identified. JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA then closes out the request; it must be resubmitted as a new request to receive further consideration.

JSRRC, MCASC, and NARA process research requests on a first-come, first-served basis. Incomplete requests that are later resubmitted lose their original "place in line." For this reason, it is very important to provide correct and complete information to JSRRC, MCASC, and NARA at the time of the initial submission.

Note: ROs have the authority to deny a claim for service connection for PTSD without requesting corroboration of an in-service stressor from an official records custodian, such as JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA, if

- the claimant fails to provide the minimum information required to conduct research, and
- the JSRRC coordinator has taken the actions described in [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii.1.D.16](#).

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

l. Denying Service Connection Because of an Unconfirmed Stressor

Denying service connection solely because of an unconfirmed stressor is improper unless the appropriate records custodian, such as JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA, has confirmed that the claimed stressor cannot be corroborated or

- the Veteran has failed to provide the basic information required to conduct research, **and**
- the JSRRC coordinator has taken the actions described in [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii.1.D.16](#).

m. Handling Requests for More Information

Occasionally, JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA requires additional information in order to conduct its research. When this occurs the RO must take immediate action to comply with the request.

Notes:

- The JSRRC coordinator may contact the Veteran by telephone to obtain the additional information needed to document the in-service stressor. The substance of the telephone call must be documented on a *Report of Contact, VA Form 119*.
- Failure by the Veteran to respond substantively to the request for information is grounds for denial of the claim based on the absence of a verifiable stressor.

Reference: For more information on stressor corroboration and the additional evidence that may be required to conduct research, see the [JSRRC Stressor Verification Guide](#).

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15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor, Continued

n. Failure of a Veteran to Provide Sufficient Information

Use the table below to determine what action to take when a Veteran fails to provide sufficient information about a claimed stressful event.

If a Veteran ...	Then ...
fails to respond within 30 days to the request for information about a claimed stressful event	<p>refer the case to the JSRRC coordinator to make a formal finding that sufficient information required to corroborate the claimed stressor(s) does not exist.</p> <p>Reference: For more information on action taken by the JSRRC coordinator, see</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.16.a, and • M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.16.b.
submits insufficient information in response to the initial request for information	<p>send a 30-day follow-up letter explaining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what information is missing, and • why the information is needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fails to respond to the follow-up letter within 30 days, or • submits information in response to the follow-up letter that is still insufficient. 	<p>refer the case to the JSRRC coordinator to make a formal finding that sufficient information required to corroborate the claimed stressor(s) does not exist.</p>

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16. Completion of a Formal Finding of a Lack of Information Required to Document the Claimed Stressor(s)

Introduction	<p>This topic contains information on completing a formal finding of a lack of information required to document the claimed stressor(s), including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • action by the JSRRC coordinator • requirements for a formal finding, and • a sample of a formal finding.
Change Date	September 8, 2009
a. Action by the JSRRC Coordinator	<p>The JSRRC coordinator will make a formal finding regarding the lack of sufficient information in the claims folder to document the occurrence of the stressful event(s) and the Veteran's involvement in it.</p> <p>To ensure that the information of record is insufficient, the JSRRC coordinator should review the claims folder to confirm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the claimant was properly notified of the information required to document the stressor(s), and • all relevant evidence, to include service records, has been considered in an attempt to confirm the occurrence of the stressful event.
b. Requirements for a Formal Finding	<p>The formal finding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • must be approved by the Veterans Service Center Manager (VSCM) or his/her designee • should be on a separate page to be filed in the claims folder, and • should note <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the actions taken to obtain the required information - that all procedures have been properly followed - that evidence of all efforts to obtain the records is in the claims folder - that all efforts to obtain the needed information have been exhausted - that further efforts would be futile, and

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- that the information required to document the stressful event(s) is unavailable.

Note: It is *not* necessary to contact the Veteran by telephone to

- advise him/her of the formal finding, or
- allow additional time to submit the needed information.

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16. Completion of a Formal Finding of a Lack of Information Required to Document the Claimed Stressor(s), Continued**c. Sample of a Formal Finding**

A sample of a formal finding of a lack of information required to document the claimed stressor(s) is shown below:

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Memorandum**

Date:

From:

RE: Private, John Q.
CSS 999 99 9999

Subj: Formal finding of a lack of information required to corroborate stressor(s) associated with a claim for service connection for PTSD.

To: File

1. We have determined that the information required to corroborate the stressful events described by the Veteran is insufficient to send to the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) and/or insufficient to allow for meaningful research of Marine Corps or National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) records.
2. All procedures to obtain this information from the Veteran have been properly followed. Evidence of written and telephonic efforts to obtain this information is in the file. All efforts to obtain the needed information have been exhausted, and any further attempts would be futile.
3. The following efforts were made in order to obtain the information necessary to corroborate stressful events for the PTSD claim:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

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Signature/Position:

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17. Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma

Introduction

This topic contains information on developing claims for service connection for PTSD based on personal trauma, including

- general information about personal trauma
- the evidence required to establish service connection
- the process for obtaining information from the Veteran
- the letters to use to obtain information from the Veteran
- the process for obtaining service records
- the problems associated with development
- alternative sources for information, and
- the process for obtaining police reports.

Change Date

September 8, 2009

a. General Information About Personal Trauma

Personal trauma is an event of human design that threatens or inflicts harm. Veterans claiming service connection for disability due to in-service personal trauma face unique problems documenting their claims.

These incidents are often violent and may lead to the development of PTSD.

Examples: Rape, physical assault, domestic battering, robbery, mugging, stalking, and harassment.

b. Evidence Required to Establish Service Connection

To establish service connection for PTSD, there *must* be credible evidence to support the Veteran's assertion that the stressful event occurred.

This does *not* mean that the evidence actually proves that the incident occurred, but that there is at least an approximate balance of positive and negative evidence that the event did occur.

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17. Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma, Continued

c. Obtaining Information From the Veteran

Identifying possible sources of evidence to support the claim may require asking the Veteran for information concerning the traumatic incident. Make this request as compassionately as possible in order to avoid causing further trauma.

Although personal trauma is most often thought of as involving female Veterans, male Veterans may also be involved. Be sure requests for evidence/ information reflect the appropriate gender of the Veteran.

d. Letters to Use to Obtain Information From the Veteran

When writing a letter to obtain information from the Veteran regarding a claim based on personal trauma, use MAP-D and select the personal assault option from the PTSD special issues screen. Enclose *VA Form 21-0781a, Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Secondary to Personal Trauma*, to solicit details of the claim.

Important: Letters used by ROs to solicit details concerning a combat stressful incident are inappropriate for PTSD claims based on personal trauma.

e. Obtaining Service Records

Review the claim and all attached documents. Request STRs and the entire personnel folder from the appropriate records custodian, if necessary.

Note: Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) must work closely with Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs) when developing personal trauma cases.

f. Problems Associated With Development

Because personal trauma is an extremely personal and sensitive issue

- many incidents of personal trauma are not officially reported, and
- the victims of this type of in-service trauma may find it difficult to produce evidence to support the occurrence of the stressor.

It is often necessary to seek alternative evidence.

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Reference: For information on alternative sources for information, see [M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.17.g.](#)

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17. Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma, Continued

**g.
Alternative
Sources for
Information**

Service records not normally requested may be needed to develop claims for service connection for PTSD based on personal trauma, including in-service sexual assault. Responses to a request for information may identify alternative sources for information, such as

- rape crisis center or center for domestic abuse
 - counseling facility
 - health clinic
 - family members or roommates
 - faculty members
 - civilian police reports
 - medical reports from civilian physicians or caregivers who may have treated the Veteran either
 - immediately following the incident, or
 - sometime later
 - chaplain or clergy
 - fellow service persons, or
 - personal diaries or journals.
-

**h.
Obtaining
Police
Reports**

Obtain reports, as appropriate, from

- military police
- shore patrol
- a provost marshal's office, or
- other military law enforcement offices.

Note: Requests may be submitted via phone, fax, e-mail, or written correspondence, as long as the request is properly documented in the claims folder.
